Job:
"Short while & fiend hath come upon me"!

55
40
57
61
83-84
103
105
112

Odds
110 1/5 - 1/2

Thirteen Days

A MEMOIR OF THE CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS

invasion
12
15
63!
126

nuclear
19
27

cf. US count vs. Cuba
4
6
18
52
66
167
163
126

Intro of nuclear
1
13
22
26 (nuc)
35
47
58

64
74
75
77
79
83-84
105
110

Fact Kolmogoli
43
49
40/44
59
102
104
122
125

nuclear
96 (Kenn)

Cuban
75
85

Thirteen Days

A MEMOIR OF THE CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS

BY *Robert F. Kennedy*

With an Afterword by
Richard E. Neustadt and
Graham T. Allison

HARVARD UNIVERSITY

W · W · Norton & Company · Inc · New York

"This would mean war."

On SATURDAY MORNING, October 27, I received a memorandum from J. Edgar Hoover, Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, that gave me a feeling of considerable disquiet. He had received information the night before that certain Soviet personnel in New York were apparently preparing to destroy all sensitive documents on the basis that the U.S. would probably be taking military action against Cuba or Soviet ships, and this would mean war. I asked myself as I drove to the White House: If the Soviets were anxious to find an answer to the crisis, why this conduct on the part of Soviet personnel? Did the Khrushchev letter really indicate a solution could be found?

It was therefore with some sense of foreboding that I went to the meeting of our Ex Comm. My concern was justified. A new, this time very formal, letter had arrived from Khrushchev to President Kennedy. It was obviously no longer Mr. Khrushchev personally who was writing, but the Foreign Office of the Kremlin. The letter was quite different from the letter received

twelve hours before. "We will remove our missiles from Cuba, you will remove yours from Turkey. . . . The Soviet Union will pledge not to invade or interfere with the internal affairs of Turkey; the U.S. to make the same pledge regarding Cuba."

To add to the feeling of foreboding and gloom, Secretary McNamara reported increased evidence that the Russians in Cuba were now working day and night, intensifying their efforts on all the missile sites and on the IL-28s. Thus began the most difficult twenty-four hours of the missile crisis.

The fact was that the proposal the Russians made was not unreasonable and did not amount to a loss to the U.S. or to our NATO allies. On several occasions over the period of the past eighteen months, the President had asked the State Department to reach an agreement with Turkey for the withdrawal of Jupiter missiles in that country. They were clearly obsolete, and our Polaris submarines in the Mediterranean would give Turkey far greater protection.

At the President's insistence, Secretary Rusk had raised the question with the representatives of Turkey following a NATO meeting in the spring of 1962. The Turks objected, and the matter was permitted to drop.* In the summer of 1962, when Rusk was in Europe, Presi-

dent Kennedy raised the question again. He was told by the State Department that they felt it unwise to press the matter with Turkey. But the President disagreed. He wanted the missiles removed even if it would cause political problems for our government. The State Department representatives discussed it again with the Turks and, finding they still objected, did not pursue the matter.

The President believed he was President and that, his wishes having been made clear, they would be followed and the missiles removed. He therefore dismissed the matter from his mind. Now he learned that the failure to follow up on this matter had permitted the same obsolete Turkish missiles to become hostages of the Soviet Union.

He was angry. He obviously did not wish to order the withdrawal of the missiles from Turkey under threat from the Soviet Union. On the other hand, he did not want to involve the U.S. and mankind in a catastrophic war over missile sites in Turkey that were antiquated and useless. He pointed out to the State Department and the others that, to reasonable people, a trade of this kind might look like a very fair suggestion, that our position had become extremely vulnerable, and that it was our own fault.

The change in the language and tenor of the letters from Khrushchev indicated confusion within the Soviet Union; but there was confusion among us as well. At that moment, not knowing exactly what to suggest, some recommended writing to Khrushchev and asking him to clarify his two letters. There was no clear course of action. Yet we realized that, as we sat there, the work was proceeding on the missile sites in Cuba, and we now had the additional consideration that if we destroyed these sites and began an invasion, the door was clearly open for the Soviet Union to take reciprocal action against Turkey.

The NATO countries were supporting our position and recommending that the U.S. be firm; but, President Kennedy said, they did not realize the full implications for them. If we carried out an air strike against Cuba and the Soviet Union answered by attacking Turkey, all NATO was going to be involved. Then, immediately, the President would have to decide whether he would use nuclear weapons against the Soviet Union, and all mankind would be threatened.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff joined the meeting and recommended their solution. It had the attraction of being a very simple next step—an air strike on Monday, followed shortly afterward by an invasion. They pointed

out to the President that they had always felt the blockade to be far too weak a course and that military steps were the only ones the Soviet Union would understand. They were not at all surprised that nothing had been achieved by limited force, for this is exactly what they had predicted.

In the midst of these deliberations, another message came, to change the whole course of events and alter history. Major Rudolf Anderson, Jr., from South Carolina, one of the two Air Force pilots who had carried out the original U-2 reconnaissance that uncovered the presence of missiles in Cuba, had since flown several other photo-reconnaissance missions and was flying one that Saturday morning, October 27. Our meeting was interrupted by the report that his plane had been hit by a SAM missile, that it had crashed in Cuba, and that he had been killed.

There was sympathy for Major Anderson and his family. There was the knowledge that we had to take military action to protect our pilots. There was the realization that the Soviet Union and Cuba apparently were preparing to do battle. And there was the feeling that the noose was tightening on all of us, on Americans, on mankind, and that the bridges to escape were crumbling.

mara said in 1968, "a period of the most intense strain I have ever
erated under, he remained calm and cool, firm but restrained,
ver nettled and never rattled."[147] "For this happy outcome to such
g and agonizing negotiations," Adlai Stevenson wrote him, "I
nk you are entitled to our gratitude."[148] Khrushchev, recalling
discussions during the crisis, said the Americans "had, on the
ole, been open and candid with us, especially Robert Ken-
dy."[149] "Looking back on it," said Harold Macmillan, "the way
t Bobby and his brother played this hand was absolutely mas-
ly. . . . What they did that week convinced me that they were both
eat men."[150]

ohn Kennedy himself, in the cruelest hour of the crisis, on the
ck Saturday before the golden Sunday, said fervently, "Thank
d for Bobby."[151] As for Robert Kennedy, he sent a letter, "in that
ange, little cramped handwriting," to Robert Lovett thanking him
his counsel and especially for a quotation Lovett had produced
ring the ordeal.

The quotation was: "Good judgment is usually the result of expe-
nce. And experience is frequently the result of bad judgment."[152]

(23)

The Cuban Connection: II

THE DAILY LIFE of an Attorney General went on. The missiles of October were an interruption, framed between Ole Miss in September, the housing order in November, the preparation for the Georgia county-unit case in December. Still Robert Kennedy could not completely disengage from Cuba. There remained Operation Mongoose. There remained the Bay of Pigs prisoners.

I

The crisis finished Mongoose. "We had a terrible experience," Robert Kennedy recalled in 1964. CIA's Task Force W was "going to send sixty people into Cuba right during the missile crisis." One of them sent word to the Attorney General that they did not mind going but wanted to make sure he thought it worthwhile. "I checked into it, and nobody knew about it. . . . The CIA didn't and the top officials didn't." The ineffable William K. Harvey, it developed, had conceived on his own the project of dispatching ten commando teams to Cuba. Three had already departed. Kennedy called a meeting at the Pentagon. As Harvey later put it, the Attorney General took "a great deal of exception." "I was furious," Kennedy remembered, "because I said you were dealing with people's lives . . . and then you're going to go off with a half-assed operation such as this. . . . I've never seen [Harvey] since."[1]

On October 30 the Executive Committee canceled all "sabotage or militant operations during negotiations with Soviets" and sent General Lansdale to Florida to make sure that Task Force W obeyed.[2] Shortly thereafter both Mongoose and the Special Group (Augmented) were abolished. The CIA, taking care of its own, made

The change in the language and tenor of the letters from Khrushchev indicated confusion within the Soviet Union; but there was confusion among us as well. At that moment, not knowing exactly what to suggest, some recommended writing to Khrushchev and asking him to clarify his two letters. There was no clear course of action. Yet we realized that, as we sat there, the work was proceeding on the missile sites in Cuba, and we now had the additional consideration that if we destroyed these sites and began an invasion, the door was clearly open for the Soviet Union to take reciprocal action against Turkey.

The NATO countries were supporting our position and recommending that the U.S. be firm; but, President Kennedy said, they did not realize the full implications for them. If we carried out an air strike against Cuba and the Soviet Union answered by attacking Turkey, all NATO was going to be involved. Then, immediately, the President would have to decide whether he would use nuclear weapons against the Soviet Union, and all mankind would be threatened.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff joined the meeting and recommended their solution. It had the attraction of being a very simple next step—an air strike on Monday, followed shortly afterward by an invasion. They pointed

out to the President that they had always felt the blockade to be far too weak a course and that military steps were the only ones the Soviet Union would understand. They were not at all surprised that nothing had been achieved by limited force, for this is exactly what they had predicted.

In the midst of these deliberations, another message came, to change the whole course of events and alter history. Major Rudolf Anderson, Jr., from South Carolina, one of the two Air Force pilots who had carried out the original U-2 reconnaissance that uncovered the presence of missiles in Cuba, had since flown several other photo-reconnaissance missions and was flying one that Saturday morning, October 27. Our meeting was interrupted by the report that his plane had been hit by a SAM missile, that it had crashed in Cuba, and that he had been killed.

There was sympathy for Major Anderson and his family. There was the knowledge that we had to take military action to protect our pilots. There was the realization that the Soviet Union and Cuba apparently were preparing to do battle. And there was the feeling that the noose was tightening on all of us, on Americans, on mankind, and that the bridges to escape were crumbling.

"How can we send any more U-2 pilots into this area tomorrow unless we take out all of the SAM sites?" the President asked. "We are now in an entirely new ball game."

At first, there was almost unanimous agreement that we had to attack early the next morning with bombers and fighters and destroy the SAM sites. But again the President pulled everyone back. "It isn't the first step that concerns me," he said, "but both sides escalating to the fourth and fifth step—and we don't go to the sixth because there is no one around to do so. We must remind ourselves we are embarking on a very hazardous course."

He asked for absolute verification that the U-2 was shot down and did not crash accidentally, and for a careful review, "before we decide finally what we shall do," of the implications of all possible courses of action. His mind went to other areas of the world. What was going to occur in Berlin, in Turkey? If we attacked Cuba, and the Russians reciprocated with an attack on Turkey, would or should the Turkish missiles be fired? He ordered preparations taken to defuse missiles with atomic warheads, so that he personally would have to give permission before they were used. What role should Turkey and the rest of NATO have in determining our response? Within a very short time, they might be faced with decisions of life and death. Before that happened, should they not have a right to learn, if not pass on, what we were deciding to do, particularly if that was likely to affect them in such a rapid and possibly devastating way?

Again and again he emphasized that we must understand the implications of every step. What response could we anticipate? What were the implications for us? He stressed again our responsibility to consider the effect our actions would have on others. NATO was supporting the United States, but were these countries truly and completely aware of the dangers for them? These hourly decisions, necessarily made with such rapidity, could be made only by the President of the United States, but any one of them might close and lock doors for peoples and governments in many other lands. We had to be aware of this responsibility at all times, he said, aware that we were deciding, the President was deciding, for the U.S., the Soviet Union, Turkey, NATO, and really for all mankind. . . .

remark: "Now, Mr. Secretary, if you and your Deputy will go back to your offices, the Navy will run the blockade."[132]

The Withdrawal of Soviet Missiles from Cuba

Chairman Khrushchev's announcement on Sunday, October 28, that "the arms which you describe as offensive [will be] crated and returned to the Soviet Union" marked the climax of the crisis.[133] A week of intense interaction between the United States and the Soviet Union preceded that announcement. That interaction was in large part a by-product of action within each nation — action that pitted government leaders against organizations whose outputs they sought to control. Indeed, the similarities between the phrases with which the groups who sat on top of each government characterized "the problem" are suggestive. As Soviet ships approached American warships stationed along the quarantine line, the American leaders sent a letter to the Soviets expressing concern "that we both show prudence and do nothing to allow events to *make the situation more difficult to control* than it is."[134] Later a Soviet reply emphasized the danger, "Contact of our ships . . . can spark off the fire of military conflict after which any talks would be superfluous because other forces and other laws would begin to operate — the *laws of war.*"[135] As the climax of the crisis drew near, developments were, in the American phrase, "approaching a point where *events could have become unmanageable.*"[136] The Russians chose another metaphor: the logic of war. "If indeed war should break out, then it would not be in our power to stop it, for such is the logic of war."[137]

Inside the Soviet Union

An understanding of the Soviet withdrawal must begin with an appreciation of the sense in which the missile crisis constituted for the Soviets a "Pearl Harbor in reverse." During the crisis, the leaders of the U.S. government vigorously debated whether the United States could perpetrate a "Pearl Harbor" — whether President Kennedy could be a "Tojo." There, "Pearl Harbor" referred to the Japanese decision to launch a surprise attack. But this symbol has another connotation as well. Especially for readers of Roberta Wohlstetter's artful account of

Pearl Harbor, this word refers to the American failure to read the handwriting on the wall.[138] It is in this sense that the Cuban missile crisis is essentially the Soviet Union's "Pearl Harbor."

Having initiated a course of action more provocative than Roosevelt's pressure on Japan, the Soviet leaders should have been alert for evidence of American preparations to seize the initiative. The clues available to them seem overwhelming. That the United States had good intelligence on the Soviet build-up was clear. A State Department briefing to reporters on August 24, Presidential statements on September 4, 7, and 13, and Undersecretary of State Ball's testimony on October 3 catalogued the Soviet build-up accurately. On September 4, in response to private assurances from Khrushchev relayed via Dobrynin to Robert Kennedy, the Presidential release itemized precisely the Soviet build-up and warned of American watchfulness for "offensive missiles."[139] On October 13, in a long conversation, Chester Bowles needled Ambassador Dobrynin on the question of whether the Soviet Union intended to insert "offensive weapons" in Cuba.[140] And on October 18, in reply to the solemn assurances from Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko that the Soviet Union was not installing offensive missiles, the President sent for and read carefully to him the list of public statements that Kennedy had made in September warning the Soviet Union against putting missiles in Cuba.[141] Could the Soviet leaders have failed to recognize that the United States was alert to the possibility of Soviet emplacement of offensive missiles in Cuba?

In this setting, the behavior of the U.S. government during the week from October 15 to the American "first strike" on October 22 could have indicated only one thing: U.S. discovery of the Soviet move and preparation for action. At the first meeting of the ExCom (October 16) the President increased the U-2 surveillance of Cuba significantly.[142] Standard observance of U-2 flights would indicate that something was up. The American government attempted to impose secrecy and initiated a program of cover and deception.[143] The President kept up appearances of normalcy, receiving astronauts and foreign dignitaries and flying to Connecticut and Cleveland to keep commitments. But what John McCone called the "high-priced help" of the government met almost continuously for an entire week.[144] Not until Thursday did someone notice that their official limousines, bearing easily identified license plates, had been assembling

several Soviet dry cargo ships stopped and the large-hatch ships returned to the Soviet Union. A conciliatory note was sounded in Khrushchev's personal Friday letter and reflected in an approach by Fomin, the head of Soviet Intelligence in Washington. Saturday, the Presidium's letter demanded that American missiles in Turkey be removed in exchange for Soviet withdrawal of missiles in Cuba, and a Soviet SAM downed an American U-2 over Cuba. Sunday, Khrushchev announced that the missiles would be withdrawn.

Some analysts have fitted these actions into a rational mold. It is just as easy to speculate about the organizational information and options that influenced these choices and actions. And various events could be interpreted as consequences of organizational procedures. For example, there is some evidence to support the speculation that Soviet government leaders did not make the decision to shoot down the American U-2 over Cuba on the final Saturday; before the crisis, orders had been issued for active defense of Cuba against U-2 overflights. On Saturday, October 27, the SAMs and radar networks finally reached operational readiness. That day the Soviet Air Defense units acted on the previous orders, which the leaders had neglected to withdraw, and shot down the first available U-2. Prudence, however, requires that the limits of confidence in the details of these explanations be acknowledged. *

Inside the United States

American intra-national relations in the critical week of the crisis constitute a catalogue of friction and frustration as political leaders in the name of flexibility and options attempted to interfere with organizational routines and procedures. The struggle over where and how the quarantine would be implemented has been noted above. Political leaders insisted that the blockade be drawn close to Cuba. The Navy maintained its position — 500 miles out from Cuba. Political leaders forced the Navy to allow Soviet ships to pass through the blockade until Thursday and did not allow a boarding until Friday.

But the operation of the blockade produced an even more startling result, the full impact of which became clear only with the publication of Robert Kennedy's intensely personal memoir of the crisis. The most moving passage in his account provides a unique picture of the American government's leaders at the limits of their control and awaiting the crunch.

nedy's advocate in the Kremlin
y Kennedy understood and
. Khrushchev and I are in the
ving this nuclear capacity and
cties."[156] Over and over, the
ument, beginning "If I were
f the ExCom heard the Presi-
s with the assertion, "Khru-
[158] Robert Kennedy recalls that
edy spent more time trying to
ar course of action on Khru-
e of what he was doing. What
s an effort not to disgrace

sis, in August 1963, some ad-
blic demand that Khrushchev
ba within sixty days. Kennedy
: "There is one thing I have
"and that is not to issue ulti-
her fellow in a position where
liation."[160] It seems clear that
nd in drawing the moral of the
University speech: "Above all,
terests, nuclear powers must
ring an adversary to the choice
nuclear war."[161]
at each "king" seems to have
manage, the game within his
d out beyond the normal span
luence to watch as many de-
ntial slip-ups, to force to the
hat might have been slighted,
rs produced a first-rate map of
ed against actions that would
e and thus "require a response
reasons of security, pride, or
rresponse and eventually an
"If they suffer a defeat . . ."
the chance of war."[163] He in-
n the Soviets be clear and,
oise was inevitable, stated his
ugh a variety of channels. He

demanded that Khrushchev be given time, again and again delaying the ExCom's preference for quick, forceful U.S. action. Perhaps recalling his own initial inclination, he bought time within his circle — time for Khrushchev to choose sensibly, time for him to get his government together and to act wisely. As RFK's memoir concludes:

> The President believed from the start that the Soviet Chairman was a rational, intelligent man who, if given sufficient time and shown our determination, would alter his position. But there was always the chance of error, of mistake, miscalculation or misunderstanding, and President Kennedy was committed to doing everything possible to lessen that chance on our side.[164]

From Blockade to Withdrawal

The attempt of both President and Chairman to dominate their internal games is illustrated by several incidents along the path from blockade to withdrawal. First, faced with these fateful decisions, both the President and the Chairman bypassed the formally established machinery, the National Security Council and the Presidium, in favor of *ad hoc* groups. The group assembled by the President and later authorized by the National Security Council as the Executive Committee of the NSC included (1) the major Cabinet and agency officers with principal responsibility for political and military decisions, (2) Presidentially selected surrogates for major segments of the public — for example, Acheson, Lovett, and McCloy as representatives of the bi-partisan foreign policy establishment; and (3) a number of advisers who were present only because of Presidential choice — for example, Robert Kennedy and Sorensen. This group functioned with minimal reliance on the standard channels down into the second or third levels of the government, causing no little pain to the players left out of the action.[165] But the pressures to cut the group off from the bureaucracy were enormous, especially in light of the President's needs.

Khrushchev seems to have assembled an ExCom of his own, including Mikoyan, Kosygin, Suslov, Brezhnev, and Kozlov.[166] Presidium candidates were not summoned to Moscow, and Podgorny — the only full member not resident in the capital — apparently remained in Kiev. Some of the Presidium members who lived in Moscow seem to have been left out of the deliberations.[167] Of necessity, both the President and the Chairman

cisions with those who shared
tions. But both also exercised
heir groups.
blockade and the testing of the
ion suggestive of an acute sense
many features of the blockade
dent. But in a number of inci-
rn the balance in favor of more
esday, October 25, the day on
fect, the Russian tanker *Bucha-*
e tanker probably carried no
be allowed to pass after simply
hand, some members of the Ex-
should be stopped and boarded
e no mistake of our will or in-
e decision, ordering American
Later that evening he decided
ba. "We don't want to push him
action," Kennedy said. "Give
nt to put him in a corner from
ennedy also permitted an East
hrough the blockade before the
and board the *Marcula*, a Soviet-
ship personally selected by the

ayed in the Soviet testing of
viously had strong allies in the
cies, who were mindful of the
ried to challenge the blockade,
e their missiles and warheads.
rgo ships and submarine escorts
missile-carrying ships returned
kely not to offend the announced
indicates strong, central, cau-

es spoke through the multiple
ween the United States and So-
e Chairman were relatively suc-
"hot line" by which to reiterate
mong the channels of communi-
and Washington in this period
n the two heads of government;

(2) private letters between the two heads of government; (3) public and private statements by U.S. officials in Washington; the Party, government, and military press in Moscow; and public and private statements by officials of both governments at the United Nations; (4) news conferences; (5) messages through intelligence channels; (6) public and private letters to third parties; (7) leaks; and (8) private communications from JFK to RFK to Dobrynin to Khrushchev.

A myriad of "signals" — some compatible and others contradictory — were sent through these channels. The "messages" tended to be garbled for two reasons. First, single communications were aimed at many audiences — for example, a public Presidential letter being directed to the Soviet government, the American permanent government, the Congress, the American public, world opinion. Second, many different individuals within each government spoke, each with his own perspective and priorities. For example, on Friday, October 26, the State Department Press Officer, Lincoln White, went beyond the White House position, emphasizing to reporters a passage in the President's Monday night speech warning that if work on the missiles continued, "further action will be justified." This piece of communication brought the President's rage down on White's head.[172]

In order to reduce the contextual noise, Kennedy and Khrushchev sought out, and used, a private, secure "hot line." Several messages were relayed from the President to the Chairman, and vice versa, through RFK and Dobrynin.[173] This channel of communication became critical in the final days.

Fourth, what much of the U.S. government regarded as the "flap in the White House" underlined differences in perspective between the President and his officials. As the second week dragged on and considerations turned to further steps, the White House did begin to flap. The President in particular, but also others who assumed a Presidential perspective, actually thought their way down paths that led in only five steps to a major nuclear war. For example: (1) the United States attacks Soviet missiles in Cuba; (2) the Soviet Union attacks U.S. missiles in Turkey and Italy; (3) NATO attacks bases from which the attack on Turkey and Italy was launched; (4) the Soviets, fearing an American attack, launch ICBMs and bombers against the United States; (5) the United States decimates the Soviet Union. What they saw should have caused a little trembling. Moreover, Kennedy, in particular, saw how miscalculation, misunderstandings,

V

Critics have called it a needless crisis. Kennedy's conduct, according to R. J. Walton, was "irresponsible and reckless to a supreme degree." Driven by "the *machismo* quality" in his character,[60] by rage over deception, by egotistical concern over personal prestige, by fear of setbacks in the elections, by a spurious notion of international credibility, Kennedy exaggerated the danger, rejected a diplomatic resolution and instead insisted on a public showdown. His purpose was the conspicuous humiliation of Khrushchev — eyeball to eyeball. Pursuing so insensate a course, he risked the incineration of the world in order to satisfy his own psychic and political needs.[61]

If Kennedy's idea had been to seek a showdown with Khrushchev, he went about it in a strange way. Instead of making a big issue of Soviet military aid to Castro during the summer of 1962, he minimized and, in the increasingly agitated Republican view, excused this aid. As late as the day before the missiles were discovered, Bundy said on national television that there was "no present evidence" and in his judgment "no present likelihood" of a "major offensive capability" in Cuba.[62] Indeed, according to some of the same critics, Kennedy's warnings about the arms shipments were so weak that the Soviet Union honestly misinterpreted them as a green light for nuclear missiles[63] — a view obviously incompatible with their theory he was on the prowl for confrontation.

Most critics have left the impression that, once the nuclear missiles were in Cuba, Kennedy should have done nothing at all. But suppose he had not forced the missiles out. Khrushchev by his own statement had sent the missiles in order to alter the balance of world power. American acquiescence would have been a stunning vindication of the Soviet 'Cold War of movement.' In a secret message via Bolshakov in June, Khrushchev had already warned the Kennedys of his intention to begin again in Berlin,* Had the missiles remained, the sixties would have been the most dangerous of decades. And acquiescence would have produced a shattering reaction in the United States. "If you hadn't acted," Robert Kennedy told his brother, "you

* On June 18, 1962, Bolshakov gave Robert Kennedy a message from Khrushchev. Khrushchev said that, if the United States continued to insist on occupation rights in West Berlin, "the Soviet Union will face the necessity of signing a peace treaty with the GDR [German Democratic Republic] and the question of liquidation of war remnants will be solved and on this basis the situation in West Berlin — a free demilitarized city — would be normalized" (RFK Papers).

would have been impeached." The President said, "That's what I think — I would have been impeached."[64]

R. J. Walton was an exception among the revisionists in conceding that, "given the political realities, Kennedy had to get the missiles removed."[65] But he and others have asserted that, instead of negotiating them out, Kennedy manufactured a public crisis. Even if he had not sought a showdown in August, he definitely sought one in October: both for personal reasons — obsession with his image, Irish temper, machismo, etc. — and for political reasons — the November election. He should, say, have discussed the missiles when Andrei Gromyko, the Soviet foreign minister, called on him at the White House three days after their discovery. If the Executive Committee had not yet figured out what to do, why did he not call Gromyko back as soon as the decision was made and before instituting the quarantine? Why did he not yield to Khrushchev at once the things that would enable the Soviet leader to remove the missiles with dignity: a no-invasion guarantee for Cuba and the removal of American Jupiter missiles from Turkey?

Charles Bohlen, that brilliant aficionado of Soviet policy, attended the meetings on the first two days. Departing on the third day, to take up new duties as ambassador to France, he left Kennedy a valedictory memorandum. The missiles, Bohlen agreed, had to be eliminated; and "no one can guarantee that this can be achieved by diplomatic action — but it seems to me essential that this channel should be tested out before military action is employed."[66] On the same day, Sorensen, summing up the discussion thus far, defined a choice between what he called "the Rusk or the Bohlen approaches." Rusk, he said, favored a limited strike without prior warning. Bohlen and "all blockade advocates" favored a "prompt letter to Khrushchev, deciding after the response whether we use air strike or blockade. . . . If you accept the Bohlen plan, we can then consider the nature of the letter to K[hrushchev]."[67]

Critics claim that Kennedy rejected the "Bohlen plan." In fact Kennedy did his best to pursue the plan. For two days, at his direction, Sorensen and others worked on letters to the Kremlin. On October 20, Sorensen reported to the President: "No one has been able to devise a satisfactory message to Khrushchev to which his reply could not outmaneuver us"[68] — by, for example, demanding submission of the dispute to the UN or to a summit meeting, thereby plunging the whole affair into a protracted diplomatic wrangle and making other forms of American reaction difficult while the missile bases were rushed to completion. The not unreasonable decision was therefore to announce the quarantine *before* beginning talks with the Russians.

After the announcement, the President began to lay the foundation for a peaceful resolution. On Tuesday, October 23, he sent his brother to make clear to Dobrynin the implications of Khrushchev's course. Robert Kennedy's memorandum of the meeting contains details omitted from *Thirteen Days*. The Attorney General reminded the ambassador that his brother, on the basis of Soviet assurances, had taken a "far less belligerent position [on the arms shipments] than people like Senators Keating and Capehart, and he had assured the American people that there was nothing to be concerned about. I pointed out, in addition, that the President felt he had a very helpful personal relationship with Mr. Khrushchev. Obviously, they did not agree on many issues, but he did feel that there was a mutual trust and confidence between them on which he could rely." The Attorney General noted that the American President had met Khrushchev's request for the withdrawal of American troops from Thailand. Sneaking nuclear missiles into Cuba now, he said, displayed the Soviet leaders as "hypocritical, misleading and false." So far as he knew, Dobrynin stoutly replied, there were no nuclear missiles in Cuba. "Dobrynin seemed extremely concerned."[69]

Everyone was extremely concerned. Plans were circulated for the evacuation of top officials to underground installations outside Washington. "I'm not going," Robert Kennedy told Edwin Guthman. "If it comes to that, there'll be sixty million Americans killed and as many Russians or more. I'll be at Hickory Hill."[70]

VI

"I sat across from the President," Robert Kennedy scribbled on a pad. It was Wednesday night, October 24. Two Soviet ships had approached to a few miles of the quarantine line.

> This was the moment we had prepared for, which we hoped would never come. The danger and concern that we all felt hung like a cloud over us all. . . . These few minutes were the time of greatest worry by the President. His hand went up to his face & covered his mouth and he closed his fist. His eyes were tense, almost gray, and we just stared at each other across the table. Was the world on the brink of a holocaust and had we done something wrong? Isn't there some way we can avoid having our first exchange be with a Russian submarine — almost anything but that, he said. . . . We had come to the edge of final decision — & the President agreed. I felt we were on the edge of a precipice and it was as if there were no way off.[71]

Robert thought inexplicably of Joe's death, of Jack's brushes with death. Then word came that the Russian ships had stopped in the

water.[72] So far so good; but the quarantine met only part of the problem. It could stop the delivery of additional missiles to Cuba. It could neither remove those already there nor prevent the completion of the bases. From the start, the Kennedys and their chief advisers had known that this was the task of negotiation, and they were prepared to negotiate. When they were trying to execute the Bohlen plan, one of Sorensen's trial drafts to Khrushchev had the President say that, if the missiles were removed under effective surveillance, "I would be glad to meet with you . . . and to discuss other problems on our agenda, including, if you wish, the NATO bases in Turkey and Italy."[73] On Friday, October 19, according to the Meeker record, "More than once during the afternoon Secretary McNamara voiced the opinion that the US would have to pay a price to get the Soviet missiles out of Cuba. He thought we would at least have to give up our missile bases in Italy and Turkey and would probably have to pay more besides."[74] The next day McNamara again said, "We would have to be prepared to accept the withdrawal of US strategic missiles from Turkey and Italy and possibly agreement to limit our use of Guantanamo to a specified limited time. He added that we could obtain the removal of the missiles . . . only if we were prepared to offer something in return."[75]

It was at this Saturday meeting that Adlai Stevenson, arriving late from the UN in New York, proposed that the quarantine, which he supported, be accompanied by an immediate statement of the American negotiating position. He specifically suggested, according to the NSC minutes, "a settlement involving the withdrawal of our missiles from Turkey and our evacuation of Guantanamo." Most present felt that to begin with concessions would legitimize Khrushchev's action and give him an easy triumph. It was Stevenson's timing and his Guantanamo proposal, Robert Kennedy said later, not his Turkish thoughts, that created his reputation as the supreme dove.[76] In the general frustration and fatigue, everyone jumped on Stevenson.

The President emphatically disagreed that the initial presentation to the UN should include our notion of an eventual political settlement. He also "sharply rejected the thought of surrendering our [Cuban] base. . . . He felt that such action would convey to the world that we had been frightened into abandoning our position." However, "he agreed that at an appropriate time we would have to acknowledge that we were willing to take strategic missiles out of Turkey and Italy if this issue was raised by the Russians. . . . But he was firm in saying we should only make such a proposal in the future."[77] Stevenson, in what O'Donnell, who was present, called "an impressive show of lonely courage,"[78] held his ground. He reiterated

"his belief that we must be more forthcoming . . . that the present situation required that we offer to give up such bases in order to induce the Russians to remove the strategic missiles."[79]

The President said afterward to O'Donnell, "I admire [Stevenson] for saying what he did."[80] Robert Kennedy, not a Stevenson fan at best, did not like it. "We had a rather strong argument with him," he wrote in his contemporaneous notes. ". . . I suggested [privately to the President] that we get someone else up at the United Nations to replace Stevenson as he was such a weak man in these kinds of negotiations."[81] In the end, John McCloy was summoned to sit at Stevenson's right hand. The President sent me to New York also to help on the UN presentation. (After reading my draft speech for Stevenson, the President called for the deletion of the more truculent passages, especially the threat of an American strike if the build-up persisted.) The Attorney General took me aside as I was rushing for the plane. "We're counting on you to watch things in New York," he said. "That fellow is ready to give everything away. We will have to make a deal in the end; but we must stand firm now. Our concessions must come at the end of negotiation, not at the start."[82] In *Thirteen Days* he made an *amende honorable:*

> Stevenson has since been criticized publicly for the position he took. . . . I think it should be emphasized that he was presenting a different perspective than the others, one which was therefore important for the President to consider. Although I disagreed strongly with his recommendations, I thought he was courageous to make them, and I might add they made as much sense as some others considered during that period of time.[83]

The last line was pure Robert Kennedy. And the disagreement, it should be emphasized, was not over the necessity for but the timing of negotiations.

In short, the advocates of quarantine assumed from the start that their course implied diplomacy somewhere down the road. The questions were when the trading should begin, how long it should take and what was to be put on the block. Critics later accused Kennedy of waiting too long, imposing too peremptory a deadline and refusing the most obvious deal — Cuban missiles for Turkish missiles.

"I would sum it up, Prime Minister," John Kennedy told Harold Macmillan on October 25, two days after the Soviet ships turned back, "by saying that by tomorrow . . . we should be in a position to

know whether there is some political proposal that we could agree to" — perhaps, he had explained earlier, withdrawing the missiles in exchange for an international guarantee of Cuba — "and whether the Russians are interested in it or not. . . . On the other hand, if at the end of 48 hours we are getting no place and the missile sites continue to be constructed then we are going to be faced with some hard decisions."[84]

Critics have detected ulterior motives behind the forty-eight-hour deadline. Unless Kennedy forced Khrushchev to retreat before the election on November 6, the journalist I. F. Stone argued in 1966, "the nuclear menace from Cuba would certainly have cost the Democrats control of the House of Representatives. . . . If Kennedy was so concerned [about peace] he might have sacrificed his chances in the election to try and negotiate. . . . Kennedy could not wait. But the country and the world could."[85] The argument lacked Stone's customary cogency. What chance would negotiations have had if the administration were trounced by a Republican party shouting for the invasion of Cuba? Repudiation of a dovish President by a hawkish electorate would have doomed any hope of a peaceful resolution. And in the meantime some of the nuclear bases would have become operational.

If negotiations were protracted, in short, their success required a strong Kennedy showing in the election. This perception only complicated Kennedy's problem. He thought the missiles an unmitigated political disaster. "We've just elected Capehart in Indiana," he said when he handed the U-2 photographs to O'Donnell, "and Ken Keating will probably be the next President."[86] If he had wished, as charged, to exploit the crisis for political advantage, the one course that would infallibly have insured a Democratic triumph in 1962 was the air strike. Ironically, this was in the main advocated by Republicans and opposed by Democrats on the Executive Committee — which suggests how little party politics mattered during the thirteen days.

The problem remains of the validity of the administration's claim that the bases were about to become operational. Critics have challenged this argument on diverging grounds. Ronald Steel has contended, correctly, that the long-range missile sites would not have been operational until mid-November; therefore Kennedy had plenty of time for negotiation, and the deadline must have derived from the election. Steel, however, overlooked the medium-range missile sites, four out of six of which, Barton J. Bernstein has argued, citing a CIA estimate, were already operational by Tuesday, October 23. Therefore, according to Bernstein, the deadline had already passed,

and Kennedy must have had some base motive for pretending otherwise.[87]

The CIA estimate did indeed list four medium-range missile "sites" as "fully operational." But it added, "We are unable to confirm the presence of nuclear warheads."* "Fully operational," in short, had an exceedingly narrow significance. Obviously the presence of nuclear warheads, not the technical operability of the sites, determined the deadline. No one could be sure when the warheads would arrive. McCone thought that the missiles would be operational by the end of the week.[88] "The last 24 hours' film," Kennedy told Macmillan on October 24, "show that they are continuing to build those rockets."[89] "What was clear," scrawled Robert Kennedy in his notes on that evening, "was that the work in Cuba was proceeding and several of the launching pads would within a few days be ready for use."[90]

The reason for the negotiating deadline was simply the conviction that, once nuclear warheads were in place and pointed at the United States, the terms of trade would undergo drastic change. "It is obvious," wrote Michel Tatu of *Le Monde,* "that if this work could be completed under cover of diplomatic negotiations over broader issues . . . Khrushchev would have won all he wanted: not only strategic reinforcement as a result of his newly built Cuban base, but also the diplomatic initiative resulting from his greater strength."[91]

Forty-eight hours remained. Was there a "political proposal" on which both sides could agree? On Thursday, October 25, Kennedy had cabled Khrushchev his hope that the Soviet Union would "permit a restoration of the earlier situation." Khrushchev's famous reply, arriving Friday evening, was a rather marvelous letter in the annals of correspondence among statesmen. While rearguing the Soviet case with due vehemence, Khrushchev set forth in highly personal language his fears about the slide toward catastrophe, ending with his knot-of-war image ("the more the two of us pull, the tighter that knot will be tied"). He concluded with a proposal: if the United States gave Cuba a no-invasion pledge, "this would immediately change everything" — no more arms sent to Cuba, no further need for Soviet military specialists in Cuba.[92]

Kennedy had no problem about what he had already described to Macmillan as a "trade of these missiles for some guarantee for Cuba."[93] He had never wanted an American invasion of Cuba, during the Bay of Pigs or thereafter. On Friday night the Executive Committee went to bed happy for the first time in eleven days. Relief

* CIA, Office of Current Intelligence, "Readiness Status of Soviet Missiles in Cuba," October 23, 1962, JFK Papers. Needless to say, Bernstein, in the manner of revisionist scholarship, suppressed the passage about nuclear warheads.

was premature. On Saturday a second letter, signed by Khrushchev but having the ring of a declaration by the Presidium, added the Turkish missiles to the list of Soviet conditions. We do not know what had gone on in Moscow. Khrushchev well understood that the Turkish missiles — Jupiters of an ancient vintage — were obsolete. Nonetheless their renunciation, he later claimed and may have thought at the time, would have "symbolic" value.[94] It would be something to show the Stalinists and the Chinese, and it might cause difficulties for the United States in NATO. On the other hand, Khrushchev may have temporarily lost control of the Presidium. There were hawks in the Kremlin too.

The Executive Committee, Robert Kennedy wrote, decided that the change in tone "indicated confusion within the Soviet Union." He dryly added: "but there was confusion among us as well."[95] For the Turkish missiles raised problems. It was not that anyone except General LeMay supposed them of much use. The President had ordered the forever dilatory State Department to get them out of Turkey months before and was incensed to find them still there. When McNamara and Stevenson had argued in the first week that Turkish missiles were a reasonable trade for Cuban missiles, Kennedy had agreed. Still, for the United States by unilateral decision to sacrifice the defense of a NATO ally would understandably affront the Turks, whose objections had delayed the missile withdrawal, and might well upset NATO.

Dubious as Harold Macmillan had been at the start about the American reaction, and fearful as he remained throughout of the dangers of escalation, the Prime Minister never wavered in his resistance to the bargaining away of NATO assets. "He may *never* get rid of Cuban rockets except by trading them for Turkish, Italian or other bases," he mused on the day of Kennedy's television speech. "Thus Khrushchev will have won his point." Toward the end of the crisis: "Anything like this deal would do great injury to NATO." Ten years later: "To make an exchange would have been fatal. If the President had done that, all credibility in the American protection of Europe would have gone."[96] Henry Kissinger, later no mean bargainer himself, took the same line outside the government.[97] Llewellyn Thompson, whose opinion carried particular weight because of his knowledge of the Soviet leadership, warned that a Turkish deal would be seen in Moscow as "proof of weakness" in Washington.[98] Nevertheless, as Robert Kennedy said soon after, "it was a rather reasonable offer," and "we would have difficulty explaining [refusal] if discussions were prolonged."[99] On the climactic Saturday the President therefore instructed Gilpatric to draw up a scenario for the

early removal of the Turkish missiles — this regarded still as an item for subsequent negotiations rather than an immediate response to the second Khrushchev letter.[100]

Then word arrived that a U-2 plane had been shot down over Cuba, its pilot killed. Four days before, the Executive Committee had recommended, in such an eventuality, "immediate retaliation upon the most likely SAM site involved."[101] Washington's reaction now was very macho — "almost unanimous agreement," in Robert Kennedy's words, "that we had to attack early the next morning . . . and destroy the SAM sites." The Joint Chiefs joyfully reminded the President "that they had always felt the blockade to be far too weak a course and that military steps were the only ones the Soviet Union would understand." "There was the feeling," said Robert Kennedy, "that the noose was tightening on all of us." The President pulled everyone back. "It isn't the first step that concerns me," he said, "but both sides escalating to the fourth and fifth step — and we don't go for a sixth because there is no one around to do so."[102] According to Graham Allison, Kennedy's order to call off the Air Force reprisal was "received with disbelief" in the Pentagon. Soon he increased the dismay of the hawks by ordering the defusing of the Turkish missiles. Allison: "For some members of the group, this was the darkest moment."[103]

VIII

In the early afternoon the State Department submitted a draft reply to Khrushchev flatly rejecting the Turkish deal. "I disagreed with the content and tenor of the letter," Robert Kennedy said later.[104] Everyone remembers his own inspired suggestion that the President forget the second Khrushchev letter and answer the first. "There were sharp disagreements," Robert Kennedy recalled. The hawks, dreaming of a Monday morning war, rallied behind the hard line. The Attorney General persisted in his criticism of the State Department letter. The President asked him to try a draft himself. In forty-five minutes Robert Kennedy and Sorensen produced a new letter offering a no-invasion guarantee in exchange for the removal of all offensive weapons systems from Cuba, all this to be accompanied by termination of the quarantine and UN inspection. The President dispatched it without delay.[105]

The deftness with which this letter elided the Turkish problem has obscured the dénouement. For, soon after the letter went off, the President instructed his brother to talk once more to Dobrynin. The two men met half an hour later at the Department of Justice. There are two accounts of this Saturday night meeting: one written three

days afterward by Robert Kennedy, and one written in 1971 on the basis of Dobrynin's dispatches by Anatoly Gromyko, a Soviet historian and son of the foreign minister.[106] Kennedy began the conversation by emphasizing the gravity of the situation. If Cubans were shooting down American planes, he said, Americans were going to shoot back. "We had to have a commitment by at least tomorrow that those bases would be removed. This was not an ultimatum, I said, but just a statement of fact." Dobrynin recalled Kennedy as very blunt and very tough.[107] According to the Gromyko account, Kennedy said that, "should war break out, millions of Americans would die. The U.S. government, he said, was trying to avoid this. Later he gave his opinion that he was sure that the Soviet Union adhered to the same view. Any delay in finding ways out of the crisis was fraught with great danger."

Kennedy went on to say, according to the Soviet version, that "the Pentagon was exerting strong pressure on his brother" in connection with the shooting down of the U-2. "Kennedy noted that, in the United States, among the highly placed generals there were many stupid heads who were always eager for a fight. He did not exclude the possibility that the situation could get out of control and lead to irreparable consequences." These remarks reflected the Attorney General's opinion, but did not appear in his own memorandum of the conversation. Later Khrushchev, dictating his memoirs, recalled Dobrynin's sketch of an exhausted Robert Kennedy — "one could see from his eyes that he had not slept for days" — saying: "Even though the President himself is very much against starting a war over Cuba, an irreversible chain of events could occur against his will. That is why the President is appealing directly to Chairman Khrushchev for his help in liquidating this conflict. If the situation continues much longer, the President is not sure that the military will not overthrow him and seize power. The American army could get out of control."[108] The escalation from the Dobrynin-Gromyko version of the *situation* getting out of control to the Khrushchev version of the *U.S. Army* getting out of control attests to Khrushchev's melodramatic temperament, spirited memory and desire to portray himself as the savior of American democracy from a military coup. While the Kennedys did not altogether dismiss *Seven Days in May,* it is unlikely that Robert Kennedy would have confided such forebodings to the Soviet ambassador.*

Dobrynin then asked what the Americans proposed. Once the Russians agreed to remove the missiles and dismantle the bases,

* Elie Abel has suggested that Khrushchev may have confused the Kennedy-Dobrynin meeting with the postcrisis negotiations over the removal of IL-28 bombers. The Russians, he wrote, "had been given reason to believe that if a fire-fight started

days afterward by Robert Kennedy, and one written in 1971 on the basis of Dobrynin's dispatches by Anatoly Gromyko, a Soviet historian and son of the foreign minister.[106] Kennedy began the conversation by emphasizing the gravity of the situation. If Cubans were shooting down American planes, he said, Americans were going to shoot back. "We had to have a commitment by at least tomorrow that those bases would be removed. This was not an ultimatum, I said, but just a statement of fact." Dobrynin recalled Kennedy as very blunt and very tough.[107] According to the Gromyko account, Kennedy said that, "should war break out, millions of Americans would die. The U.S. government, he said, was trying to avoid this. Later he gave his opinion that he was sure that the Soviet Union adhered to the same view. Any delay in finding ways out of the crisis was fraught with great danger."

Kennedy went on to say, according to the Soviet version, that "the Pentagon was exerting strong pressure on his brother" in connection with the shooting down of the U-2. "Kennedy noted that, in the United States, among the highly placed generals there were many stupid heads who were always eager for a fight. He did not exclude the possibility that the situation could get out of control and lead to irreparable consequences." These remarks reflected the Attorney General's opinion, but did not appear in his own memorandum of the conversation. Later Khrushchev, dictating his memoirs, recalled Dobrynin's sketch of an exhausted Robert Kennedy — "one could see from his eyes that he had not slept for days" — saying: "Even though the President himself is very much against starting a war over Cuba, an irreversible chain of events could occur against his will. That is why the President is appealing directly to Chairman Khrushchev for his help in liquidating this conflict. If the situation continues much longer, the President is not sure that the military will not overthrow him and seize power. The American army could get out of control."[108] The escalation from the Dobrynin-Gromyko version of the *situation* getting out of control to the Khrushchev version of the *U.S. Army* getting out of control attests to Khrushchev's melodramatic temperament, spirited memory and desire to portray himself as the savior of American democracy from a military coup. While the Kennedys did not altogether dismiss *Seven Days in May,* it is unlikely that Robert Kennedy would have confided such forebodings to the Soviet ambassador.*

Dobrynin then asked what the Americans proposed. Once the Russians agreed to remove the missiles and dismantle the bases,

* Elie Abel has suggested that Khrushchev may have confused the Kennedy-Dobrynin meeting with the postcrisis negotiations over the removal of IL-28 bombers. The Russians, he wrote, "had been given reason to believe that if a fire-fight started

Kennedy said, "in return, if Cuba and Castro and the Communists ended their subversive activities in other Central and Latin American countries, we would agree to keep peace in the Caribbean and not permit an invasion from American soil." Both accounts say that Dobrynin was the first to mention the Turkish missiles. "I replied," Kennedy reported to Rusk, "that there could be no quid pro quo — no deal of this kind could be made. . . . It was up to NATO to make the decision. I said it was completely impossible for NATO to take such a step under the present threatening position of the Soviet Union. If some time elapsed — and per your instructions, I mentioned four to five months — I said I was sure that these matters could be resolved satisfactorily." This understanding, the Attorney General added, would be canceled at once if the Soviet government tried to claim public credit for it. They parted. Robert Kennedy's last words, Dobrynin cabled Moscow, were: "Time will not wait, we must not let it slip away."

So concluded a singular exercise in secret diplomacy — secret not only in process, as most diplomacy must be, but in result, which is generally inadmissible. Macmillan and NATO were told nothing, nor was the American Congress, nor even the Executive Committee. "They were very private," Douglas Dillon said of the Kennedy-Dobrynin talks, "and were not always necessarily reported in great detail, even to those of us on the ExComm. . . . All of us felt that we just couldn't take [the Turkish missiles] out as part of the deal, even though we knew that they were coming out anyway."[109] Probably no one except the Kennedys, McNamara, Rusk, Ball and Bundy knew what Robert Kennedy had told Dobrynin. The American people certainly did not know until Robert Kennedy himself described the meeting in *Thirteen Days,* a half dozen years later — and then his account was so muted that Harold Macmillan believed to the end of the day that no such bargain was ever struck, and critics continued to portray John Kennedy as recklessly preferring confrontation to negotiation.* *

The Russians made one attempt to put the deal on the record.

---

the Washington 'hawks' might overpower the 'doves,' invade Cuba and get rid of Castro. . . . 'We were happy to leave them believing that could happen,' one of the American negotiators recalled." (Abel, *The Missile Crisis* [New York: Bantam reprint, 1966], 191. See also Abel, "The Khrushchev Version of the Cuban Missile Crisis," *Washington Post,* January 4, 1971.)

* See, e.g., FitzSimons: "In face of this admittedly reasonable proposal, President Kennedy persisted in refusing to negotiate, preferring to force the Soviet retreat at the risk of war rather than even discuss a 'not unreasonable' proposal" (Louise FitzSimons, *The Kennedy Doctrine* [New York, 1972], 167). Also Bernstein: "Why, on Saturday, the 27th, when the only issue blocking settlement was American withdrawal of our missiles from Turkey, did the administration reject this condition and risk . . . moving toward nuclear war?" (Barton J. Bernstein, "'Courage and Commitment': The

Two days after their decisive conversation, Dobrynin brought Robert Kennedy an unsigned letter from Khrushchev to the President spelling everything out. After brooding over the letter, the Attorney General called the Soviet ambassador to his office. Robert Kennedy's scribbled notes for the interview define the American position:

> Read letter — Studied it over night.
> No quid pro quo as I told you.
> The letter makes it appear that there was.
> You asked me about missile bases in Turkey. I told you we would be out of them — 4–5 months. That still holds. . . . You have my word on this & that is sufficient.
> Take back your letter — Reconsider it & if you feel it is necessary to write letters then we will also write one which you cannot enjoy.
> Also if you should publish any document indicating a deal then it is off & also if done afterward will further affect the relationship.*

Dobrynin withdrew the letter. Nothing was heard of it thereafter.†

In short, the Kennedys made a personal, but not official, pledge that the Turkish missiles would go. On October 29, the day after the settlement, John McNaughton, the general counsel of the Defense Department, told an interdepartmental task force: "Those missiles are going to be out of there by April 1 if we have to shoot them out."[110] With NATO assent, they went. On April 25, 1963, almost exactly five months after Robert Kennedy's talk with Dobrynin, McNamara sent John Kennedy a handwritten note: "The last Jupiter missiles in Turkey came down yesterday. The last Jupiter warhead will be flown out of Turkey on Saturday."[111]

Was this secret diplomacy justified? — a testing question for those who think that no President should ever make a secret commitment. It is extremely doubtful that any Turkish agreement could have been made publicly in the forty-eight hours before the bases acquired

Missiles of October," *Foreign Service Journal*, December 1975). Also Horowitz: "Khrushchev's offer . . . to exchange the missile bases in Turkey for the bases in Cuba was turned down" (David Horowitz, *The Free World Colossus* [New York, 1965], 386).

* RFK, handwritten notes, n.d. [October 30, 1962], RFK Papers. At one point Dobrynin said that of course the Soviet government would not publish the correspondence. Kennedy said, "Speaking quite frankly, you also told me your government never intended to put missiles in Cuba" (RFK to Dean Rusk, reporting on the interview, October 30, 1962, RFK Papers).

† Later the bargain was mentioned by Khrushchev and Anatoly Gromyko in their accounts of the crisis, though Gromyko, faithful to the agreement, based his account on *Thirteen Days* rather than on Dobrynin's cables. (See Khrushchev, *Khrushchev Remembers: Last Testament* [Boston, 1974], 512; Gromyko, "Diplomatic Efforts of the USSR to Liquidate the Crisis," *Voprosy Istorii*, August 1971.) The Russians evidently briefed Castro but swore him to silence too. He told Lee Lockwood in December 1966, "One day perhaps it will be known that the United States made some other concessions in relation to the October Crisis besides those which are made public" (Lockwood, *Castro's Cuba, Cuba's Fidel* [New York, 1967], 204). Castro told Herbert Matthews in October 1967: "Kennedy was willing to give up the Turkish and Greek [sic] bases" (Matthews, *Fidel Castro*, 225).

nuclear warheads. If the deal appalled Harold Macmillan, it would have been even more appalling to NATO governments less determined to get along with Washington. At home the deal would have caused an uproar in Congress, in the Pentagon, among the voters; very likely within the Executive Committee itself. "I did not accept the explanation that the [Turkish] missiles had become obsolete," said General LeMay afterward, ". . . nor did any other military man I know."[112] Only secret diplomacy could have assured Khrushchev the Turkish withdrawal that, along with the Cuban no-invasion guarantee, covered his retreat before his opponents on the Presidium. More important, the willingness to make this additional concession doubtless helped persuade the Russians that the American government was truly bent on peace (and accounts for the indulgent treatment the Kennedys later received in Soviet accounts of the crisis). Perhaps there may be a place for secret diplomacy, at least when nuclear war is involved and when no vital interests of a nation or ally are bartered away.

As the world knows, on that golden Sunday morning, the day after Robert Kennedy and Dobrynin had their chat about the Turkish missiles, Khrushchev announced his nuclear retreat from Cuba. In Havana, Castro — who had not been consulted — cursed, kicked the wall in a rage and broke a mirror.[113] "The possibility that the Soviet Union would withdraw [the missiles]," he said later, "was an alternative that had never entered our minds."[114] Having begun his misbegotten adventure by lying to Kennedy, Khrushchev ended by lying to Castro.[115]

In Washington most of us felt a sense of limitless relief. Not all the Chiefs, however: "Admiral [George] Anderson's reaction to the news," Robert Kennedy noted, "was, 'We have been had.' General LeMay said, 'Why don't we go in and make a strike on Monday anyway.'" "The military are mad," the President told me the next morning. "They wanted to do this. It's lucky for us that we have McNamara over there."[116] "The first advice I'm going to give my successor," he said two weeks later, "is to watch the generals and to avoid feeling that just because they were military men their opinions on military matters were worth a damn."[117] Still, for the moment, even the original hawk, Dean Acheson, was confounded. On October 29, he congratulated Kennedy on his "leadership, firmness and judgment," adding that the dénouement "amply shows the wisdom of the course you chose — and stuck to."*

Contrary to the latter-day supposition, the President did not think

* A month later he wrote again, praising Kennedy's policy as "wisely conceived and vigorously executed" (Dean Acheson to JFK, October 29 and November 30, 1962, JFK Papers).

Surrounde
Kennedy,
Joseph Jr.

the resolution would help him in the election. It was too bad, he said to me, that this had happened in the midst of the campaign. The Republicans would now feel compelled to denounce the settlement. They will say, he said, "that we had a chance to get rid of Castro and, instead of doing so, ended up by guaranteeing him."[118]

On Sunday he had said to his brother that this was the night he should go to the theater, like Lincoln. Robert Kennedy:

> I said if he was going to the theater, I would go too, having witnessed the inability of [Vice President] Johnson to make any contribution of any kind during all the conversations. Frequently, after the meetings were finished, he would circulate and whine and complain about our being weak but he never made . . . any suggestions or recommendations. On Saturday night he started to move around saying he heard that the people felt we were backing down. When I asked him for specifics he had none.*

"He was against our policy on Cuba," Robert Kennedy said the next year. ". . . I never quite knew what he was for but he was against it. . . . He was shaking his head, mad."[119]

"The 10 or 12 people who had participated in all these discussions," Robert Kennedy wrote that November, "were bright and energetic people. We had perhaps amongst the most able in the country and if any one of half a dozen of them were President the world would have been very likely plunged in a catastrophic war."[120]

IX

Loose ends remained. Castro in his rage refused to permit UN verification of the missile removal. He also refused to yield the IL-28 bombers. These, unlike the missiles, could be reasonably claimed as Cuban property. Khrushchev sent Mikoyan to Havana. Castro kept him waiting so long that Adlai Stevenson said it might be necessary to send James Donovan down to get him out.[121] Llewellyn Thompson advised Kennedy to insist on the IL-28s; Khrushchev, having swallowed a camel, would not strain at a gnat.[122] "Wondering at times," Sorensen said, "whether his stand was necessary," the President insisted.[123]

Castro was obdurate. Stevenson and McCloy, conducting the negotiations in New York, were prepared to drop UN inspection, give

* RFK, memorandum, November 15, 1962, RFK Papers. Robert Kennedy told me in 1965: "[Johnson] was displeased with what we were doing. . . . He said that he had the feeling that we were being too weak . . . and that we should be stronger. We discussed it afterwards and the President knew it was because he was talking to perhaps some of his congressional friends" (RFK, in interview by author, February 27, 1965, 24, also 38, JFK Oral History Program).

the Russians time to deal with the Cubans over the bombers, make the no-invasion pledge anyway and lift the quarantine. Robert Kennedy, as usual, thought Stevenson excessively weak. His own platform was no inspection, no pledge. He was, however, prepared to lift the quarantine at once if the Russians would withdraw the bombers in thirty days. Thompson supported an offer along these lines, deeming it important that "Khrushchev have something to show to his colleagues in the Kremlin."[124]

The Attorney General carried this proposal to Dobrynin on an evening when the Soviet ambassador was entertaining the Bolshoi Ballet. After the two men talked in private, Dobrynin introduced the President's brother to the dancers. The prima ballerina, the enchanting Maya Plisetskaya, said, "You and I were born on the same day and same year." "We gave each other a little kiss," Kennedy wrote in his journal. "I asked her where she would be on November 20th and she said, 'In Boston.' I said I would send her a present." Then he said a few words to the troupe, telling them that "I felt a little awkward speaking to them as I had trouble doing the two-step; that although I had read in the papers that there were some differences between their country and mine (to which they laughed) that all of us in both countries recognized excellence and that it was a great honor to have this group visit the United States."[125]

But the Russians rejected his proposal. Three days after the Bolshoi evening, Robert Kennedy held "the most unpleasant conversation I have had with Dobrynin. It made it seem that perhaps I had seen him too frequently. I said this to the President the next day. I said I thought it was good that I could do this but certainly not in every day exchanges nor developing a familiarity which made statements by me at critical times less effective."[126] Debate continued within the administration. "President reluctant to send in low level flights," Robert Kennedy noted (on the back of an envelope) regarding a meeting on Monday, November 19. ". . . How far can we push K[hrushchev]."[127] That afternoon the Attorney General warned Georgi Bolshakov that low-level reconnaissance, with all its attendant dangers, would start again unless the Russians promised to remove the bombers. He needed an answer, Kennedy said, before the President's press conference the next day.[128]

The next day — November 20 — was Robert Kennedy's thirty-seventh birthday. Dobrynin came to his office in the morning. Smiling broadly, he said, "I have a birthday present for you," and handed him a letter from Khrushchev agreeing to remove the IL-28s in thirty days. "Reading the letter I noticed a number of rather humorous references"; also "that the letter was rather disorganized. Dobrynin

said these letters were dictated by Khrushchev himself . . . walking around the room, never looking at the girl, . . . [who] just wrote as he talked." That afternoon John Kennedy announced the agreement. Bolshakov was in the Attorney General's office. "We had a drink together and listened to the President's news conference. He pronounced it very good. I then had him sing 'Happy Birthday' in Russian to Maya Plisetskaya who was in Boston. I don't know how he reported that back to the Kremlin."[129]

This was Bolshakov's farewell performance. The State Department had never liked his special relationship with the Attorney General; nor presumably had Dobrynin, who had by now established a special relationship of his own with the Attorney General. After Joseph Alsop exposed Bolshakov's role in a column, the Kremlin decided that his usefulness in Washington was over and recalled him. In March 1963, Robert Kennedy sent him a handwritten note in Moscow:

> There is still peace even though you have been gone from the United States for more than two months. I would not have thought that possible.
>
> Anyway we all miss you. I hope you are telling all your Communist friends what nice people we are over here — and that they believe you. . . . Give my best wishes to my friend Maya. Why don't you two jump into one of those brand new luxurious jet liners and fly over and see us? She could dance, I could sing and you could make a speech.
>
> Best wishes from your friend,
>
> Robert F. Kennedy[130]

x

Why had Khrushchev given up? "This is a mystery," Castro said bitterly the next March. "Maybe historians will be able to clarify this twenty or thirty years hence. I don't know."[131] The assurances about the Cuban guarantee and the Turkish missiles undoubtedly helped sweeten his retreat.* But the political concessions were face savers.

* On October 30, U Thant told Castro in Havana that the United States had proposed a UN inspection team "composed of persons whose nationalities would be acceptable to the Cuban government. . . . The United States told me [U Thant continued] that as soon as this system is set up they would make a public declaration, and if necessary in the Security Council, that they would relinquish any aggressive intentions against the Cuban government and would guarantee the territorial integrity of the nation. They asked me to tell you this." As Maurice Halperin well says, this offer "might have appeared to anyone except Fidel, as a real turning point in revolutionary Cuba's uncertain and extremely costly struggle for survival" (Maurice Halperin, *The Rise and Decline of Fidel Castro* [Berkeley, 1972], 196). However, since Castro chose to resist inspection to the end, the guarantee never went into formal effect. In his November 20 statement on the IL-28s, John Kennedy said only: "For our part, if all

said these letters were dictated by Khrushchev himself . . . walking around the room, never looking at the girl, . . . [who] just wrote as he talked." That afternoon John Kennedy announced the agreement. Bolshakov was in the Attorney General's office. "We had a drink together and listened to the President's news conference. He pronounced it very good. I then had him sing 'Happy Birthday' in Russian to Maya Plisetskaya who was in Boston. I don't know how he reported that back to the Kremlin."[129]

This was Bolshakov's farewell performance. The State Department had never liked his special relationship with the Attorney General; nor presumably had Dobrynin, who had by now established a special relationship of his own with the Attorney General. After Joseph Alsop exposed Bolshakov's role in a column, the Kremlin decided that his usefulness in Washington was over and recalled him. In March 1963, Robert Kennedy sent him a handwritten note in Moscow:

> There is still peace even though you have been gone from the United States for more than two months. I would not have thought that possible.
>
> Anyway we all miss you. I hope you are telling all your Communist friends what nice people we are over here — and that they believe you. . . . Give my best wishes to my friend Maya. Why don't you two jump into one of those brand new luxurious jet liners and fly over and see us? She could dance, I could sing and you could make a speech.
>
> Best wishes from your friend,
>
> Robert F. Kennedy[130]

X

Why had Khrushchev given up? "This is a mystery," Castro said bitterly the next March. "Maybe historians will be able to clarify this twenty or thirty years hence. I don't know."[131] The assurances about the Cuban guarantee and the Turkish missiles undoubtedly helped sweeten his retreat.* But the political concessions were face savers.

* On October 30, U Thant told Castro in Havana that the United States had proposed a UN inspection team "composed of persons whose nationalities would be acceptable to the Cuban government. . . . The United States told me [U Thant continued] that as soon as this system is set up they would make a public declaration, and if necessary in the Security Council, that they would relinquish any aggressive intentions against the Cuban government and would guarantee the territorial integrity of the nation. They asked me to tell you this." As Maurice Halperin well says, this offer "might have appeared to anyone except Fidel, as a real turning point in revolutionary Cuba's uncertain and extremely costly struggle for survival" (Maurice Halperin, *The Rise and Decline of Fidel Castro* [Berkeley, 1972], 196). However, since Castro chose to resist inspection to the end, the guarantee never went into formal effect. In his November 20 statement on the IL-28s, John Kennedy said only: "For our part, if all

The real reason Khrushchev pulled out was his hopeless military situation. In his explanation to the Supreme Soviet in December 1962, he emphasized that Cuba was to be attacked in two or three days. An American invasion of Cuba would have been a disaster for Khrushchev personally and for the Soviet claim to world revolutionary leadership — especially when Khrushchev's own recklessness had handed America the pretext. What Communist state would trust Soviet promises thereafter? And, if Kennedy were serious about invasion, Khrushchev could do nothing about it, short of nuclear war against a stronger nuclear power. He was not suicidal. "It would have been preposterous," Khrushchev said later, "for us to unleash a war against the United States from Cuba. Cuba was 11,000 kilometers from the Soviet Union. Our sea and air communications were so precarious that an attack against the US was unthinkable."* Lacking conventional superiority in the Caribbean, he could neither break the blockade nor protect Cuba against invasion. Lacking strategic superiority, Khrushchev could not safely retaliate elsewhere in the world.

"What would have happened," Barton J. Bernstein later asked for the critics, "if Khrushchev . . . had refused to back down, and had chosen war instead of humiliation?"[132] But Khrushchev had never for a moment considered choosing war; and Kennedy was prepared to help him escape humiliation. The missile crisis was a triumph, perhaps the only triumph, of flexible response. Had conventional strength remained at January 1961 levels, McNamara later informed Kennedy, "we would not have had enough forces to meet the minimum requirements stated by the Joint Chiefs of Staff to carry out a successful invasion of Cuba**. . . even if we had put every available combat-ready unit not committed to an overseas theatre into the operation, leaving no reserve for other contingencies."[133] When Kennedy mobilized, Khrushchev had no choice but to cash in his chips and get out of the game. Kennedy's genius lay in making sure he had chips to cash in.

As for Kennedy, he had thought the odds on war, according to Sorensen, "between one out of three and even."[134] McNamara, re-

offensive weapons are removed from Cuba and kept out of the hemisphere in the future, under adequate verification and safeguards, and if Cuba is not used for the export of aggressive Communist purposes, there will be peace in the Caribbean" (*Public Papers . . . 1962* [Washington, 1963], 831). In practice, aerial reconnaissance took the place of inspection, and the United States without formal commitment refrained from invasion (which it had never intended in any case).

* Khrushchev, *Last Testament*, 511. According to Hervé Alphand, the French ambassador to Washington, "De Gaulle said there was really no risk. Because he was sure of what the Russian reaction would be. It was a sure decision" (interview in *W*, October 28–November 4, 1977).

The real reason Khrushchev pulled out was his hopeless military situation. In his explanation to the Supreme Soviet in December 1962, he emphasized that Cuba was to be attacked in two or three days. An American invasion of Cuba would have been a disaster for Khrushchev personally and for the Soviet claim to world revolutionary leadership — especially when Khrushchev's own recklessness had handed America the pretext. What Communist state would trust Soviet promises thereafter? And, if Kennedy were serious about invasion, Khrushchev could do nothing about it, short of nuclear war against a stronger nuclear power. He was not suicidal. "It would have been preposterous," Khrushchev said later, "for us to unleash a war against the United States from Cuba. Cuba was 11,000 kilometers from the Soviet Union. Our sea and air communications were so precarious that an attack against the US was unthinkable."* Lacking conventional superiority in the Caribbean, he could neither break the blockade nor protect Cuba against invasion. Lacking strategic superiority, Khrushchev could not safely retaliate elsewhere in the world.

"What would have happened," Barton J. Bernstein later asked for the critics, "if Khrushchev . . . had refused to back down, and had chosen war instead of humiliation?"[132] But Khrushchev had never for a moment considered choosing war; and Kennedy was prepared to help him escape humiliation. The missile crisis was a triumph, perhaps the only triumph, of flexible response. Had conventional strength remained at January 1961 levels, McNamara later informed Kennedy, "we would not have had enough forces to meet the minimum requirements stated by the Joint Chiefs of Staff to carry out a successful invasion of Cuba** . . . even if we had put every available combat-ready unit not committed to an overseas theatre into the operation, leaving no reserve for other contingencies."[133] When Kennedy mobilized, Khrushchev had no choice but to cash in his chips and get out of the game. Kennedy's genius lay in making sure he had chips to cash in.

As for Kennedy, he had thought the odds on war, according to Sorensen, "between one out of three and even."[134] McNamara, re-

offensive weapons are removed from Cuba and kept out of the hemisphere in the future, under adequate verification and safeguards, and if Cuba is not used for the export of aggressive Communist purposes, there will be peace in the Caribbean" (*Public Papers . . . 1962* [Washington, 1963], 831). In practice, aerial reconnaissance took the place of inspection, and the United States without formal commitment refrained from invasion (which it had never intended in any case).

* Khrushchev, *Last Testament*, 511. According to Hervé Alphand, the French ambassador to Washington, "De Gaulle said there was really no risk. Because he was sure of what the Russian reaction would be. It was a sure decision" (interview in *W*, October 28–November 4, 1977).

calling the magnificent sunset over the Potomac on Saturday evening, October 27, said later he had wondered how many more sunsets he was destined to see.[135] Did these highly intelligent men really believe we were on the edge of catastrophe? Recalling one's own tumult of emotion, and subtracting a certain relish in crisis not unknown on the New Frontier (not much shared, however, by the rather prudent Kennedys or by the analytical McNamara), I would say: one lobe of the brain had to recognize the ghastly possibility; another found it quite inconceivable. The President "believed from the start," his brother said, "that the Soviet Chairman was a rational, intelligent man who, if given sufficient time and shown our determination, would alter his position."[136] The two men had taken each other's measure in Vienna. A year's secret correspondence had enlarged each one's sense of the other. Kennedy's grim odds were based on fear, not of Khrushchev's intention, but of human error, of something going terribly wrong down the line. This is why he took such care to maintain tight control over American reactions.

In retrospect, I am bound to say that the risk of war* in October 1962 seems to me to have been exaggerated — pardonably at the time and less pardonably in historical recapitulation. Still Khrushchev, no less than Kennedy, might have been betrayed down the line — and perhaps he was more at the mercy of his military than Kennedy was of the Pentagon.* Even with the justified assumption of reciprocal rationality a terrible risk remained. Robert Kennedy had hoped to include in *Thirteen Days* a discussion of the ultimate ethical question: "What, if any, circumstance or justification gives . . . any government the moral right to bring its people and possibly all people under the shadow of nuclear destruction?"[137] How many statesmen would raise such a question? How many philosophers answer it?

Had the Americans, as Soviet theology supposed, been looking for an excuse to smash Castro or, for that matter, the Soviet Union, they could hardly have found a better one than the Soviet attempt to make Cuba a nuclear outpost. Kennedy's restraint now persuaded Khrushchev of the point the Soviet leader had rejected in Vienna — that neither side dare tamper carelessly with the explosive international equilibrium. The Kremlin fell silent about Berlin and for

* Khrushchev told Norman Cousins in 1963, "When I asked the military advisers if they could assure me that holding fast would not result in the death of five hundred million human beings, they looked at me as though I was out of my mind or, what was worse, a traitor. The biggest tragedy, as they saw it, was not that our country might be devastated and everything lost, but that the Chinese or the Albanians would accuse us of appeasement or weakness" (Cousins, "The Cuban Missile Crisis: An Anniversary," *Saturday Review*, October 15, 1977).

calling the magnificent sunset over the Potomac on Saturday evening, October 27, said later he had wondered how many more sunsets he was destined to see.[135] Did these highly intelligent men really believe we were on the edge of catastrophe? Recalling one's own tumult of emotion, and subtracting a certain relish in crisis not unknown on the New Frontier (not much shared, however, by the rather prudent Kennedys or by the analytical McNamara), I would say: one lobe of the brain had to recognize the ghastly possibility; another found it quite inconceivable. The President "believed from the start," his brother said, "that the Soviet Chairman was a rational, intelligent man who, if given sufficient time and shown our determination, would alter his position."[136] The two men had taken each other's measure in Vienna. A year's secret correspondence had enlarged each one's sense of the other. Kennedy's grim odds were based on fear, not of Khrushchev's intention, but of human error, of something going terribly wrong down the line. This is why he took such care to maintain tight control over American reactions.

In retrospect, I am bound to say that the risk of war* in October 1962 seems to me to have been exaggerated — pardonably at the time and less pardonably in historical recapitulation. Still Khrushchev, no less than Kennedy, might have been betrayed down the line — and perhaps he was more at the mercy of his military than Kennedy was of the Pentagon.* Even with the justified assumption of reciprocal rationality a terrible risk remained. Robert Kennedy had hoped to include in *Thirteen Days* a discussion of the ultimate ethical question: "What, if any, circumstance or justification gives . . . any government the moral right to bring its people and possibly all people under the shadow of nuclear destruction?"[137] How many statesmen would raise such a question? How many philosophers answer it? Lots.

Had the Americans, as Soviet theology supposed, been looking for an excuse to smash Castro or, for that matter, the Soviet Union, they could hardly have found a better one than the Soviet attempt to make Cuba a nuclear outpost. Kennedy's restraint now persuaded Khrushchev of the point the Soviet leader had rejected in Vienna — that neither side dare tamper carelessly with the explosive international equilibrium. The Kremlin fell silent about Berlin and for

* Khrushchev told Norman Cousins in 1963, "When I asked the military advisers if they could assure me that holding fast would not result in the death of five hundred million human beings, they looked at me as though I was out of my mind or, what was worse, a traitor. The biggest tragedy, as they saw it, was not that our country might be devastated and everything lost, but that the Chinese or the Albanians would accuse us of appeasement or weakness" (Cousins, "The Cuban Missile Crisis: An Anniversary," *Saturday Review*, October 15, 1977).

some years thereafter showed a certain respect for existing world frontiers. On the other hand, the Russians, determined never to be caught again in a position of gross nuclear inferiority, stepped up their production of missiles. Within a decade they came close to parity with the United States. Khrushchev meanwhile disappeared from the scene, in part a casualty of Cuba. In dismissing him in October 1964, the Presidium spoke harshly of his "harebrained scheming, hasty conclusions, rash decisions and actions based on wishful thinking."[138] His downfall moderated the Cold War of movement. It also ended the de-Stalinization campaign, the loosening in the joints of a despotic society, the gusts of fresh air that this rollicking, erratic, passionate, indelibly human, curiously attractive figure brought to the nation he loved so much.

Once Khrushchev accepted the Vienna principle, it was possible to move toward détente. If nuclear missiles had remained in Cuba, there would have been no American University speech, no test ban treaty, no 'hot line' between the White House and the Kremlin, no relief from the intolerable pressures of the Cold War. After Cuba, relief was not only thought to be possible but felt to be imperative. During the crisis, talking with Ormsby-Gore, his friend of so many years, the President had suddenly burst out: "You know, it really is an *intolerable* state of affairs when nations can threaten each other with nuclear weapons. This is just so totally irrational. A world in which there are large quantities of nuclear weapons is an impossible world to handle. We really must try to get on with disarmament if we get through this crisis . . . because this is just too much."[139] This was Khrushchev's feeling too, the theme of his impassioned letter; and the crisis deepened both their urgencies. "If thou gaze too long into the abyss," said Nietzsche, "the abyss will gaze into thee."

XI

The record demands the revision of the conventional portraits of Kennedy during the crisis: both the popular view, at the time, of the unflinching leader fearlessly staring down the Russians until they blinked; and the later left-wing view of a man driven by psychic and political compulsions to demand unconditional surrender at whatever risk to mankind.[140] Far from rejecting diplomacy in favor of confrontation, Kennedy in fact took the diplomatic path after arranging the military setting that would make diplomacy effective.

The hard-liners thought him fatally soft. Dean Acheson in another year: "So long as we had the thumbscrew on Khrushchev, we should have given it another turn every day. We were too eager to make an

some years thereafter showed a certain respect for existing world frontiers. On the other hand, the Russians, determined never to be caught again in a position of gross nuclear inferiority, stepped up their production of missiles. Within a decade they came close to parity with the United States. Khrushchev meanwhile disappeared from the scene, in part a casualty of Cuba. In dismissing him in October 1964, the Presidium spoke harshly of his "harebrained scheming, hasty conclusions, rash decisions and actions based on wishful thinking."[138] His downfall moderated the Cold War of movement. It also ended the de-Stalinization campaign, the loosening in the joints of a despotic society, the gusts of fresh air that this rollicking, erratic, passionate, indelibly human, curiously attractive figure brought to the nation he loved so much.

Once Khrushchev accepted the Vienna principle, it was possible to move toward détente. If nuclear missiles had remained in Cuba, there would have been no American University speech, no test ban treaty, no 'hot line' between the White House and the Kremlin, no relief from the intolerable pressures of the Cold War. After Cuba, relief was not only thought to be possible but felt to be imperative. During the crisis, talking with Ormsby-Gore, his friend of so many years, the President had suddenly burst out: "You know, it really is an *intolerable* state of affairs when nations can threaten each other with nuclear weapons. This is just so totally irrational. A world in which there are large quantities of nuclear weapons is an impossible world to handle. We really must try to get on with disarmament if we get through this crisis . . . because this is just too much."[139] This was Khrushchev's feeling too, the theme of his impassioned letter; and the crisis deepened both their urgencies. "If thou gaze too long into the abyss," said Nietzsche, "the abyss will gaze into thee."

XI

The record demands the revision of the conventional portraits of Kennedy during the crisis: both the popular view, at the time, of the unflinching leader fearlessly staring down the Russians until they blinked; and the later left-wing view of a man driven by psychic and political compulsions to demand unconditional surrender at whatever risk to mankind.[140] Far from rejecting diplomacy in favor of confrontation, Kennedy in fact took the diplomatic path after arranging the military setting that would make diplomacy effective.

The hard-liners thought him fatally soft. Dean Acheson in another year: "So long as we had the thumbscrew on Khrushchev, we should have given it another turn every day. We were too eager to make an

agreement with the Russians."[141] Richard Nixon inevitably thought that Kennedy's doves had "enabled the United States to pull defeat out of the jaws of victory."[142] Or Daniel Patrick Moynihan in 1977: "The Cuban Missile Crisis was actually a *defeat*. . . . When anybody puts missiles into a situation like that, he should expect to have a lot of trouble with the United States, and real trouble — and all that happened was the agreement: 'O.K., you can have your man down there permanently.'"[143]

The revisionists, on the other hand, portrayed Kennedy as reckless and irresponsible. This was not the view of those in the best position to judge — neither of Khrushchev nor, in the end, of Castro himself. In a time of "serious confrontation," Khrushchev said, ". . . one must have an intelligent, sober-minded counterpart with whom to deal. . . . I believe [Kennedy] was a man who understood the situation correctly and who genuinely did not want war. . . . Kennedy was also someone we could trust. . . . He showed great flexibility and, together, we avoided disaster. . . . He didn't let himself become frightened, nor did he become reckless. . . . He showed real wisdom and statesmanship."[144] In 1967 Castro told Herbert Matthews that he thought Kennedy had "acted as he did partly to save Khrushchev, out of fear that any successor would be tougher."[145] And in 1975 Castro told George McGovern: "I would have taken a harder line than Khrushchev. I was furious when he compromised. But Khrushchev was older and wiser. I realize in retrospect that he reached the proper settlement with Kennedy. If my position had prevailed, there might have been a terrible war. I was wrong."[146]

In all this, Robert Kennedy was the indispensable partner. Without him, John Kennedy would have found it far more difficult to overcome the demand for military action. Even Senator Fulbright, in Kennedy's meeting with congressional leaders before his television speech, had advocated the invasion of Cuba as a "wiser course" than the quarantine.* It was Robert Kennedy who oversaw the Executive Committee, stopped the air-strike madness in its tracks, wrote the reply to the Khrushchev letter, conducted the secret negotiations with Dobrynin. "Throughout the entire period of the crisis," Mc-

* Fulbright's point was that a quarantine, by involving a direct confrontation with Soviet ships, would be more likely to provoke a nuclear war than an invasion that would pit Americans against Cubans. He evidently forgot about the 22,000 Russian soldiers in Cuba. He said later, "We had not gone through the days of considering various alternatives, advantages and disadvantages. . . . Had I been able to formulate my views on the basis of facts since made public rather than on a guess as to the nature of the situation, I might have made a different recommendation" (*Congressional Record*, December 10, 1973, S22289; see also interview with R. W. Howe and Sarah Trott, *Saturday Review*, January 11, 1975).

Namara said in 1968, "a period of the most intense strain I have ever operated under, he remained calm and cool, firm but restrained, never nettled and never rattled."[147] "For this happy outcome to such long and agonizing negotiations," Adlai Stevenson wrote him, "I think you are entitled to our gratitude."[148] Khrushchev, recalling the discussions during the crisis, said the Americans "had, on the whole, been open and candid with us, especially Robert Kennedy."[149] "Looking back on it," said Harold Macmillan, "the way that Bobby and his brother played this hand was absolutely masterly. . . . What they did that week convinced me that they were both great men."[150]

John Kennedy himself, in the cruelest hour of the crisis, on the black Saturday before the golden Sunday, said fervently, "Thank God for Bobby."[151] As for Robert Kennedy, he sent a letter, "in that strange, little cramped handwriting," to Robert Lovett thanking him for his counsel and especially for a quotation Lovett had produced during the ordeal.

The quotation was: "Good judgment is usually the result of experience. And experience is frequently the result of bad judgment."[152]

brought up Indochina. "We haven't enough time to talk about Vietnam," said Kennedy, "but I'd like to talk to you about Cuba."

He had thought about few subjects, Kennedy said, with greater care. "There is no country in the world . . . where economic colonization, humiliation and exploitation were worse than in Cuba, in part owing to my country's policies during the Batista regime. I believe that we created, built and manufactured the Castro movement out of whole cloth and without realizing it." He assured Daniel "that I have understood the Cubans. I approved the proclamation which Fidel Castro made in the Sierra Maestra. . . . I will go even further: to some extent it is as though Batista was the incarnation of a number of sins on the part of the United States. Now we shall have to pay for those sins. In the matter of the Batista regime, I am in agreement with the first Cuban revolutionaries. That is perfectly clear."

Unfortunately, Kennedy continued, it had ceased to be a purely Cuban problem. It had become a Soviet problem. Castro had betrayed his promises of the Sierra Maestra and "has agreed to be a Soviet agent in Latin America." In so doing, he had brought the world to the verge of nuclear war. The Russians understood this; "I don't know whether [Castro] realizes this, or even if he cares about it." Kennedy rose; the interview was over. Daniel detained him for two quick questions. Did the American President see an incompatibility between American liberalism and socialist collectivism? Kennedy said, "We get along very well with Tito and Sekou Touré." What about the economic blockade of Cuba? "The continuation of the blockade," Kennedy said, "depends on the continuation of subversive activities." Then: "Come and see me on your return from Cuba. Castro's reactions interest me."[82]

Daniel went on to Havana. On November 5, Bundy told Attwood that the President was more interested than the State Department in exploring the Cuban overtures. A State Department memorandum of November 7 certainly took a much harder line than the White House. "Before the United States could enter into even minimum relations with any Cuban Government," the Department opined, Havana would not only have to end political, economic and military dependency on "the Sino-Soviet bloc"* and cease its subversion within the hemisphere, but would have to "renounce Marxism-Leninism as its ideology, remove Communists from positions of influence, provide compensation for expropriated properties and restore private enterprise in manufacturing, mining, oil and distribution.[83] This insistence on repealing most of the revolution was not part of

* It seems incredible, but the troubles between Moscow and Peking had evidently not come to the notice of the State Department, at least not of the American Republics Division.

the outcome of the attempt to disrupt Venezuela's December presidential election. This was the month when Castro, with great fanfare, was staging his Week of Solidarity with the Venezuelan revolution. Finally Daniel booked passage to Mexico City for November 20. At ten o'clock on the evening of the nineteenth, Castro, accompanied by Vallejo, unexpectedly came to his hotel room.

They talked till four in the morning. Daniel described his conversation with Kennedy. Castro listened, Daniel thought, with "devouring and passionate interest," stroking his beard, tugging on his paratrooper's beret, "making me the target of a thousand malicious sparks cast by his deep-sunk lively eyes." He made Daniel repeat three times Kennedy's indictment of Batista; three times also Kennedy's remark that Castro himself, in defiance of the superpowers, had almost brought the world to nuclear war. Khrushchev, Castro recalled, had called Kennedy "a capitalist with whom one could talk." Daniel felt that Castro saw Kennedy as an "intimate enemy."

"I believe Kennedy is sincere," Castro finally said. "I also believe that today the expression of this sincerity could have political significance. . . . He inherited a difficult situation. . . . I also think he is a realist." But, instead of addressing himself to the particularities of negotiation, Castro rambled on about the iniquities of American policy. He blandly denied to Daniel the Cuban revolutionary role in Latin America of which he had bragged earlier that month to Herbert Matthews. He refused to discuss Cuban relations with Russia; "I find this indecent." As for relations with Washington, "We have forgotten the United States. We feel neither hatred nor resentment anymore, we simply don't think about the US." Still he could not understand why Washington would not accept Cuba as it was. "Why am I not Tito or Sekou Touré?"

He continued to ramble. Someday, he thought, there would appear in the United States a man capable of understanding the explosive reality of Latin America. "Kennedy could still be this man," he mused. "He still has the possibility of being, in the eyes of history, the greatest President of the United States, the leader who may at last understand that there can be coexistence between capitalists and socialists. . . . He would then be an even greater President than Lincoln. . . . Personally, I consider him responsible for everything, but I will say this: he has come to understand many things over the past few months; and then too, in the last analysis, I'm convinced that anyone else would be worse. . . . You can tell him that I'm willing to declare Goldwater my friend if that will guarantee Kennedy's reelection!"

Castro was in no hurry about negotiation. He supposed he had all the time in the world. He made no comment on Kennedy's Miami

> responsibility for autocratic governments simply because they are anti-Communist — a course which can eventually lead many people to believe that the foreign communist autocracy which they don't know is preferable to the local autocracy which they do know. . . .
>
> The prospects now are for a shorter war.[104]

Kennedy disagreed. "Just before his death," according to Henry Brandon, "he gave Mike Forrestal, in private conversation, odds of a hundred-to-one that the U.S. could not win. But he also knew that he could not get out of Vietnam before the elections in November, 1964, without inviting his own political eclipse."[105] He still supposed he had plenty of time for maneuver. He told Forrestal, "I want to start a complete and very profound review of how we got into this country, what we thought we were doing and what we now think we can do. . . . I even want to think about whether or not we should be there."[106] Wayne Morse, one of the few senatorial critics of the involvement, saw him in mid-November. Kennedy said, "Wayne, I want you to know you're absolutely right in your criticism of my Vietnam policy. Keep this in mind. I'm in the midst of an intensive study which substantiates your position on Vietnam."[107] "The facts that he envisaged a troop withdrawal and that he spoke often of the necessity of ending American participation in the war lest it become a swamp into which the United States sinks more and more," said Pierre Salinger, "prove, in my judgment, that he was on the right track at the time of his death."[108]

Of course he should have asked the searching questions long before. He should have realized the cumulative momentum of the policy of small concessions. When Kennedy became President, there were 685 American military advisers in Vietnam. In October 1963 there were 16,732. This was a formidable escalation. Still, Kennedy sent many fewer troops to Vietnam than Khrushchev sent to Cuba in 1962 or Johnson to the Dominican Republic in 1965.* The total number of American soldiers killed in Vietnam as a result of hostile action from the beginning of 1961 to the end of 1963 was only 73[109] — 73 too many, but still inconsiderable compared to the tragedy to come. The process was hardly irreversible. Troops, once sent, could be withdrawn, as they were in Cuba and the Dominican Republic, as Kennedy already planned to do in Vietnam.

Kennedy had proved his manhood in the Solomon Islands and did not have to prove it again. He was a prudent executive, not inclined to heavy investments in lost causes. His whole Presidency was marked precisely by his capacity to *refuse* escalation — as in Laos, the Bay of Pigs, the Berlin Wall, the missile crisis. "Having discussed military

* And indeed only 2000 more than Eisenhower sent to Lebanon in 1958.

affairs with him often and in detail for fifteen years," wrote General Gavin, "I know he was totally opposed to the introduction of combat troops in Southeast Asia."[110] After Dallas, Ho Chi Minh said thoughtfully to Maneli that Kennedy would perhaps have contributed to an early end of the war; "his death creates new problems."[111] Kennedy's failure lay in the hopelessly divided legacy he left on November 22, 1963.

operable, under effective United Nations arrangements. [Note that, instead of arguing with Mr. K. over whether his missiles and planes were intended to be offensive, he insisted on action against those "capable of offensive use."]

As I read your letter, the key elements of your proposals—which seem generally acceptable as I understand them—are as follows:

1. You would agree to remove these weapons systems from Cuba under appropriate United Nations observation and supervision; and undertake, with suitable safeguards, to halt the further introduction of such weapons systems into Cuba.

2. We, on our part, would agree—upon the establishment of adequate arrangements through the United Nations to ensure the carrying out and continuation of these commitments—(a) to remove promptly the quarantine measures now in effect and (b) to give assurances against an invasion of Cuba. [Note that, unlike the action to be undertaken by Khrushchev, ours was conditional upon UN arrangements.]

. . . the first ingredient, let me emphasize . . . is the cessation of work on missile sites in Cuba and measures to render such weapons inoperable, under effective international guarantees. The continuation of this threat, or a prolonging of this discussion concerning Cuba by linking these problems to the broader questions of European and world security, would surely lead to an intensification of the Cuban crisis and a grave risk to the peace of the world.

At the private request of the President, a copy of the letter was delivered to the Soviet Ambassador by Robert Kennedy with a strong verbal message: The point of escalation was at hand; the United States could proceed toward peace and disarmament, or, as the Attorney General later described it, we could take "strong and overwhelming retaliatory action . . . unless [the President] received immediate notice that the missiles would be withdrawn." That message was conveyed to Moscow.

Meanwhile the Executive Committee was somewhat heatedly discussing plans for the next step. Twenty-four Air Force Reserve troop carrier squadrons were called up. Special messages to NATO, De Gaulle and Adenauer outlined the critical stage we had reached. The POL blockade, air-strike and invasion advocates differed over what to do when. An invasion, it was observed, might turn out differently than planned if the overground rockets (FROGs) spotted by our planes in the Soviet armored division now in Cuba were already equipped with nuclear warheads. In front of the White House, more

than a thousand pickets mustered, some pleading for peace, some for war, one simply calling JFK a traitor.

The President would not, in my judgment, have moved immediately to either an air strike or an invasion; but the pressures for such a move on the following Tuesday were rapidly and irresistibly growing, strongly supported by a minority in our group and increasingly necessitated by a deterioration in the situation. The downing of our plane could not be ignored. Neither could the approaching ship, or the continuing work on the missile sites, or the Soviet SAMs. We stayed in session all day Saturday, and finally, shortly after 8 P.M., noting rising tempers and irritability, the President recessed the meeting for a one-hour dinner break. Pressure and fatigue, he later noted privately, might have broken the group's steady demeanor in another twenty-four or forty-eight hours. At dinner in the White House staff "mess," the Vice President, Treasury Secretary Dillon and I talked of entirely different subjects. The meeting at 9 P.M. was shorter, cooler and quieter; and with the knowledge that our meeting the next morning at 10 A.M. could be decisive—one way or the other—we adjourned for the night.

SUCCESS

Upon awakening Sunday morning, October 28, I turned on the news on my bedside radio, as I had each morning during the week. In the course of the 9 A.M. newscast a special bulletin came in from Moscow. It was a new letter from Khrushchev, his fifth since Tuesday, sent publicly in the interest of speed. Kennedy's terms were being accepted. The missiles were being withdrawn. Inspection would be permitted. The confrontation was over.

Hardly able to believe it, I reached Bundy at the White House. It was true. He had just called the President, who took the news with "tremendous satisfaction" and asked to see the message on his way to Mass. Our meeting was postponed from 9 to 11 A.M. It was a beautiful Sunday morning in Washington in every way.

With deep feelings of relief and exhilaration, we gathered in the Cabinet Room at eleven, our thirteenth consecutive day of close collaboration. Just as missiles are incomparably faster than all their predecessors, so this world-wide crisis had ended incredibly faster than all its predecessors. The talk preceding the meeting was boisterous. "What is Castro saying now?" chortled someone. Robert McNamara said he had risen early